

VZCZCXRO7506
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0537/01 1840918
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 030918Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9986
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0172
RUCNFB/FBI WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000537

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, G/TIP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: TIP TASK FORCE: UP BUT NOT QUITE RUNNING

REF: A. FREETOWN 473

[1](#)B. SECSTATE 85572

[1](#)C. 05 FREETOWN 748

Summary

[1](#)1. On June 22, the Minister of Social Welfare met with PolOff to discuss the progress of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Task Force. The minister voiced concerns over the contents of the 2005 TIP Report, but was committed to the establishment of the Task Force. In its first meeting, the Task Force established a temporary designation for the secretariat and set a date for the next meeting where a TIP

SIPDIS

Action Plan for 2006-2007 would be developed. These are positive developments that illustrate the GoSL's willingness to partner with the USG and other agencies to address this issue. We expect this momentum to continue and the TIP Action Plan to provide an agenda for anti-trafficking efforts. End Summary.

Plan for TIP Task Force Moves Forward

[1](#)2. On June 22, PolOff and Pol Intern met with Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) Shirley Gbujama to discuss the progress of the TIP Task Force. Gbujama, having read the 2005 TIP report, was prepared to discuss her concerns and plans for the future of the TIP Task Force. She said the Task Force's first meeting would be held on June 27, nominees from several government ministries are expected to serve on the Task Force.

[1](#)3. Gbujama said at this point logistics present the greatest challenge for the Task Force. The first meeting would address plans to create a secretariat, division of labor and responsibilities for Task Force members, and financing. Gbujama said she and Attorney General Fredrick Carew would attend the first meeting to ensure that the Task Force is operating properly, but after the initial meeting a Task Force Coordinator would be appointed to report directly to them and they would no longer attend themselves.

Minister of Social Welfare Eager to Discuss
Concerns Over the 2005 TIP Report

¶4. The Task Force's first priority is to examine the new Anti-Trafficking Act and determine a plan of action for enforcement. However, Gbujama argued that the prevalence of trafficking was overestimated in the U.S. report and she did not expect to find a significant number of cases in Sierra Leone. She claimed that child fostering, a long-standing cultural practice, is more prevalent and is misinterpreted as criminal trafficking. She provided several examples of children she cared for personally and asked if her actions constituted trafficking. PolOff encouraged Gbujama to review a UNICEF-sponsored report on trafficking which emphasizes the difference between fostering and trafficking and describes the forms of trafficking occurring in Sierra Leone. Gbujama agreed that it was necessary to gather hard data and statistics in order to fully understand the scope of the trafficking problem

¶5. Gbujama was upset by language in the 2005 TIP report implying that a MSWGCA official was involved in trafficking but never prosecuted. Gbujama said that she was familiar with the case and when questioned about the involvement of the official she told police that the suspect was only performing her official duties, not participating in the fraudulent adoption scam. She was sure that this is why the case against the official was dropped and resented any implication of corruption in her ministry. (Note: The MSWGCA official referred to in the report is Chief Social Development Officer Teresa Vamboi, the Ministry's point person on adoptions. Post has seen a 50 percent adoption fraud rate and has been working with Vamboi to improve orphanage oversight procedures. See ref C for a summary of the 2005 police raid on an orphanage in Makeni that never went to court. While we are certain that orphanage staff were misinforming biological parents about the permanent, irrevocable nature of adoptions, we see no evidence that Vamboi was involved in child trafficking. End Note.)

FREETOWN 00000537 002 OF 002

TIP Task Force Off To a Slow But Steady Start

¶6. The TIP Task Force launch meeting was held on June 27 with representatives from the MSWGCA, Sierra Leone Police, Immigration, Attorney General's Office and the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology. Members decided to temporarily house the TIP Secretariat with the MSWGCA Child Welfare Secretariat. During the next meeting, scheduled for July 11, the Task Force will receive a TIP orientation and an update from NGOs and government service providers. The activities of the TIP Task Force are supported by the UNICEF Child Protection Capacity Building Project in cooperation with the MSWGCA, and one of UNICEF's top priorities for the Task Force is the development of a National Action Plan. (Note: Post is now processing a \$100,000 ESF grant to UNICEF to support their TIP activities. End Note.)

Comment

¶7. The GoSL has taken the first steps toward establishing and empowering the TIP Task Force. Disagreements over the scope of the problem notwithstanding, the GoSL has shown that it is willing to work with the USG and other partners to address trafficking in this country. Nevertheless, it is important that the Task Force coordinators not get bogged down with logistical concerns and focus on substantive goals. Creation and implementation of the TIP Action Plan will be the threshold for measuring the GoSL's commitment to this issue. End Comment.
HULL